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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7689
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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AMCONSUL DANANG
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

Saigon 14509 7-18-69

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY [signature] DATE 1/21/82
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 14509

KATHAMDU FOR AMB BUNKER

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

PARIS FOR VN MISSION

SUBJ: FOREIGN MINISTER ANSWERS SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE'S QUESTIONS ON NLF PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS

REF: SAIGON 14073

1. VIETNAM PRESS REPORTED JULY 18 THAT FONMIN TRAN CHANH THANH APPEARED BEFORE THE SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE JULY 16, OSTENSIBILY TO REPORT ON PRES THIEU'S STATE VISITS TO THE REPUCLIC OF CHINA AND SOUTH KOREA AS WELL AS ON RECENT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES IN WHICH THE GVN HAD PARTICIPATED. FOLLOWING HIS FORMAL PRESENTATION, HOWEVER, THE FONMIN RESPONDED TO SENATORS' QUESTION CONCERNING COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS WHICH HAD BEEN RAISED AS A RESULT OF PRES THIEU'S JULY 11 SPEECH AND IN THANH'S PRESS

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CONFERENCE JULY 12.

2. REFERRING TO HIS OWN PRESS CONFERENCE, MIN THANH SAID THAT HIS VIEWS HAD NOT BEEN ACCURATELY REPORTED BY SOME MEMBERS OF THE PRESS. TH H SAID THAT SOME REPORTERS HAD MISTAKENLY DEDUCED FROM HIS REMARKS THAT THE GVN HAD AGREED TO ALLOW NLF PARTICPATION IN ELECTION BECAUSE IT DID NOT CONSIDER THE NLF TO BE COMMUNIST. THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER, SAID THANH, IS THAT THE GVN WOULD NOT ACCPET AS SUFFICIENT THE NLF'S WORD THAT THEY WERE NOT COMMUNISTS. THE NLF MUST FIRST BEHAVE AS NON-COMMUNISTS. IF THEY OPERATED LIKE THE COMMUNISTS, THE FONMIN SAID, THEY VIOLATE THE CONSTITUTION AND WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO RUN CANDIDATES.

3. COMMENT: AT ONE POINT IN HIS SOMEWHAT CONTRADICTORY JULY 12 PRESS CONFERENCE, FONMIN THANH HAD SEEMED TO SAY THAT NLF MEMBERS COULD PARTICPATE IN ELECTIONS SO LONG AS THEY DID NOT DECLARE THEMSEVLES TO BE COMMUNISTS. THIS POINT DREW FIRE FROM HARD-LINERS WHO INTERPRETED IT TO MEAN THAT GVN WAS NULLIFYING PRACTICAL EFFECT OF ARTICLE 4, SINCE NLF DID NOT NORMALLY PROCLAIM ITSELF TO BE COMMUNIST. IN RESPONDING TO HARD-LINING CRITICISM FROM SENATE, THANH HAS NEUTRALIZED SOME OF THE CRITICS BUT AT THE PRICE OF SOME FURTHER OBFUSCATION OF THE ISSUE. THIEU HIMSELF, IN TALKING WITH SOME LEGISLATORS, HAS TAKEN THE MORE STRAIGHFORWARD LINE THAT HIS OFFER OF NLF PARTICIPATION DIDN'T VIOLATE THE CONSTITUTION BECAUSE IN THE LAST ANALYSIS IT WILL BE UP TO THE ASSEMBLY TO DECIDE WHETHER TO ACCEPT A PEACE SETTLEMENT AND WHETHER THE TERMS OF SUCH A SETTLEMENT REQUIRE AMENDMENT OF THE CONSTITUTION.
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